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Senate

The Senate met at 9:30 a.m. and was called to order by the Honorable KIRSTEN E. GILLIBRAND, a Senator from the State of New York.

PRAYER

The PRESIDING OFFICER. Today's opening prayer will be offered by American Legion national chaplain Rev. Lawrence L. Vollink from Ypsilanti, MI.

The guest Chaplain offered the following prayer:

Let us pray.

For all of our honorable Senators and staff, we pray, eternal God. We thank You for all of the blessings You have bestowed upon us, especially for this great Nation we are privileged to serve. We ask that You be with all of our leaders who are making the decisions that affect us, that You would endow them with courage and conviction, adding wisdom to their knowledge and flavoring it with humility.

May our motivations be out of our love for all people to help them to live peacefully. We ask for tasks that are suited to our strength, but we ask for Your strength for any task You have given us. Help us to live in the knowledge that You have matched us to this hour in history and that the place and time of our service to You and to our country is not random but by Your wisdom and direction.

Father, walk close to our Senators, that they may not fail. Remind all of us, Lord, that Your wisdom is not found in an hour, a day, or a year but in a process that lasts a lifetime, with You, Lord, by our side. We ask for patience, for understanding, as our Senators serve this beloved country.

We ask that You watch over our Armed Forces this day and always.

O Lord, You are our strength and shield. Bless us with Your abiding presence, now and forever. Amen.

PLEDGE OF ALLEGIANCE

The Honorable KIRSTEN E. GILLIBRAND led the Pledge of Allegiance, as follows:

I pledge allegiance to the Flag of the United States of America, and to the Republic for which it stands, one nation under God, indivisible, with liberty and justice for all.

APPOINTMENT OF ACTING PRESIDENT PRO TEMPORE

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The clerk will please read a communication to the Senate from the President pro tempore (Mr. BYRD).

The bill clerk read the following letter:

U.S. SENATE,
PRESIDENT PRO TEMPORE,
Washington, DC, July 23, 2009.

To the Senate:

Under the provisions of rule I, paragraph 3, of the Standing Rules of the Senate, I hereby appoint the Honorable KIRSTEN E. GILLIBRAND, a Senator from the State of New York, to perform the duties of the Chair.

ROBERT C. BYRD,
President pro tempore.

Mrs. GILLIBRAND thereupon assumed the chair as Acting President pro tempore.

RECOGNITION OF THE MAJORITY LEADER

The ACTING PRESIDENT pro tempore. The majority leader is recognized.

SCHEDULE

Mr. REID. Madam President, following leader remarks, the Senate will resume consideration of the Department of Defense authorization bill. Last night, I filed cloture on this bill. The vote is expected to occur 1 hour after we come in tomorrow. Germane first-degree amendments must be filed at the desk prior to 1 p.m. today in order to be considered postcloture.

Rollcall votes in relation to amendments are expected to occur throughout the day and into the evening. This is the time for people who have indicated they want to offer amendments to do so. We had a lot of down time in which Members could have, but we are making progress on the bill. It is my understanding, from speaking to the managers, that for the most contentious issues, there is a pathway to completion. I hope that in fact is the case.

RECOGNITION OF THE MINORITY LEADER

The ACTING PRESIDENT pro tempore. The Republican leader is recognized.

HEALTH CARE WEEK VII, DAY II

Mr. MCCONNELL. Madam President, last night, the President, to his credit, reiterated what the American people have been saying for weeks: that the Democratic health care proposals we have seen so far aren't where they need to be. I couldn't agree with him more. President Obama also said that rising health care costs are an imminent threat to our economy and that any reform must reduce these long-term costs.

The problems the President highlighted are real and, here again, Republicans agree with him. Unfortunately, the solutions to these problems are not in the Democrat plans now working their way through Congress. In fact, the bills we have seen would make these problems even worse. The director of the Congressional Budget Office has said that these proposals would increase overall health care spending, not reduce it. All of us want health care reform. But we want reform that brings down costs and long-term spending, not a so-called reform that makes things even worse.

The President also said health care reform must not increase the national

● This "bullet" symbol identifies statements or insertions which are not spoken by a Member of the Senate on the floor.



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debt. Republicans agree with that too. But, again, both Democrat bills we have seen would saddle Americans with hundreds of billions of dollars of additional debt, making the situation even worse. Just yesterday, the Chairman of the Federal Reserve warned that unless we get serious about spending and debt, we are endangering not only our recovery from the current recession but also endangering future economic growth. That is why he said any health care reform must get control of costs. Otherwise, it could bankrupt both our government and eventually our entire economy.

So the last thing we need is a flawed health care bill that adds to the national debt and increases long-term health care costs. Instead of trying to rush through proposals that don't work, we need to take the time to do it right and make the reforms the American people are asking for—reforms that won't put us on the road to bankruptcy.

DEBT AND SECURITY

Mr. McCONNELL. Madam President, earlier this year I came to the Senate floor and outlined a number of foreign policy principles that have served our Nation well in the past and which I believe would serve us well in the future. In doing so, it was my hope that these principles would serve as the basis of steady bipartisan cooperation between the Senate and the new administration. These principles transcend party; they are time-tested; and they can be summed up in a single sentence: the cornerstone of U.S. National security policy lies in maintaining a strong and ready defense and in keeping our alliances strong.

As the Senate continues to debate the Defense authorization bill, I would like to take the opportunity to reiterate the importance of this fundamental principle of action and to highlight something that seriously endangers our ability to uphold it. I am referring to our Nation's staggering National debt.

The national debt threatens our way of life; it threatens the value of our national currency; and it threatens our ability to pay for entitlements that millions of Americans depend on. Yet, just as importantly, the national debt also endangers our position in the world, the long term capabilities of our military, and the long-term viability of the all-volunteer force that is currently serving us so ably and courageously in two very challenging wars. And that is why it is increasingly urgent that we focus on this growing threat and do something about it.

Let us put the current situation in context. The story of the American military over the past century reflects what historians have described as a feast or famine approach to defense. The pattern goes back at least as far as our entry into World War I and extends through our involvement in World War

II, the Korean war, and Vietnam. In every case, the U.S. military underwent an abrupt expansion of manpower and armaments only to be followed by calls for a drawdown in the size of our force and a reduction in defense spending. This pattern, though not always well-advised, may have been understandable in some cases in the past. But the nature of our current threats and position in the world makes it indefensible today.

With developments in weapons technology, America no longer has the luxury of isolation. And September 11 showed us that we can no longer leave ungoverned territories unwatched. The demands on today's military are constant. We are either on offense, or we are at risk. Feast or famine and isolationism no longer work.

And this is why our ever-growing national debt is so perilous—because even those who believe as I do that a strong and ready defense is the cornerstone of our security will not be able to guarantee it if current fiscal trends persist. Put simply: if we do nothing to pay down this debt and address the needs of Social Security, Medicare, and Medicaid, then America risks finding itself so weakened financially that some day in the not-too-distant future we just will not have the resources we need to equip and maintain our forces in the places they are needed most.

Consider the fact that the Federal Government is now spending an average of \$100 million a day just to pay the interest on a single piece of legislation, the \$1 trillion stimulus bill that Congress passed earlier this year. Or that it is estimated we will pay \$347 billion in interest on just this one bill over the next 10 years. At current rates of spending, that is enough to provide health care for our Nation's veterans for more than 5 years. It is enough to cover the salaries and benefits of all our active-duty and reserve forces for 2½ years. Or it is nearly \$350 billion we could put back into the pockets of the American people at a time when they could really use it.

And that is just one piece of legislation. Now imagine what it costs to finance our entire national debt. By the end of the decade, it is estimated that under the President's budget we will spend nearly \$800 billion a year just to cover the interest on the national credit card—not reducing what we owe, but just keeping the creditors from knocking on the door. Here is the frightening part of where we are: by 2017, the amount of money we are expected to spend on interest alone will exceed the amount of money we are expected to spend that year on all of defense.

The implications of this for our national security are clear. More and more, our ability to deploy forces with state-of-the-art weaponry is in competition with our financial obligation to the countries that hold our debt, and we get closer to the day when countries that hold large amounts of U.S. debt, such as China and Saudi Arabia, could

directly influence the foreign policy decisions of a future President.

We also get closer to the day when our allies and partners will rethink the value of a relationship with the United States.

Sooner or later, we will have to face the fact that we are on a path that leads to some very unpleasant choices. Either we default on our debts, which we will not do, print more money to cover those debts and tempt a massive inflationary spiral, or be forced to withdraw from our security commitments, just as Great Britain did at the end of the Second World War.

America's all-volunteer force costs a lot of money to maintain. Indeed, one of the major reasons we have been able to avoid conscription in this country since the Vietnam war has been our ability to maintain recruiting and retention policies through an attractive retirement system, recruiting bonuses, incentive pay and sensible housing allowances. In current dollars, military personnel costs have increased from \$69 billion to \$131 billion a year over the past decade.

But these necessary expenses will soon be crowded out by the growing cost of long-term entitlements and the growing principal and higher and higher interest payments on our debt. And spending increases we now regard as necessary may no longer be possible. The choice is clear: in order to provide for the common defense, we must reform entitlement programs that are consuming a larger and larger share of our budget and reduce the national debt.

Cutting \$100 million here or there in discretionary costs will not do the trick. In 1965, discretionary spending accounted for 62 percent of the budget. Today, it accounts for just 38 percent. As discretionary spending has become a smaller and smaller part of the pie, mandatory spending on entitlements and debt has become a bigger and bigger part of the pie. In 1965, mandatory spending and interest accounted for 38 percent of the budget. Today, they account for 62 percent or nearly two-thirds of the entire budget.

This means that in order to face our problem head on, we will have to address the problem of entitlement spending. And the only serious option on the table is the Conrad-Gregg proposal which would provide a clear pathway for fixing these long-term challenges by forcing us to get debt and spending under control.

I have had a number of good conversations about this proposal with the President. Based on those conversations, I am hopeful it will be given serious attention. For the safety and security of our Nation, the Conrad-Gregg proposal deserves broad bipartisan support.

Every Secretary of Defense must confront the tension between America's near-term readiness and future investment. But some future Defense Secretary will no longer be able to make